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University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

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Matt Nesmith

Assistant Professor of Theater - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Nesmith traveled to Germany in July to participate with three UNH Theater students in an intensive three-week program at the International Performing Arts Institute.



Joop Van Den Ende Academy and Stage Entertainment Studios in Hamburg, Germany, where the performers from IPAI auditioned and took part in master classes

Kiefersfelden is a small, quaint village in the southern Bavarian Alps, near Germany's border with Austria. It is home to cobblestone sidewalks, centuries-old homes and buildings, fantastic natural beauty, and warm, inviting residents. It is also home to the International Performing Arts Institute (IPAI), a three-week intensive program that brings together student artists who have a passion for musical theatre and opera with professional instructors and master teachers from America and Europe. Over the course of the intensive session, approximately 30 student-artists, each of whom auditioned to be part of the IPAI Company, have the opportunity to hone their craft in individual and ensemble instruction in voice, acting, movement, and dance. In addition, they study life skills, professional aspects of the entertainment industry in Europe, and German language. All of this study culminates in public performances in Kiefersfelden and, more importantly, an opportunity to audition for and participate in master classes with top industry professionals in Hamburg and Munich.

This was my first year as a faculty member and coordinator of musical theatre at IPAI, and I honestly didn't know what to expect going in. I hadn't been to Germany before, and I was traveling with my wife and two small children, so there were a lot of unknowns. However, once we arrived and began to meet and interact with my

colleagues and the student-artists, a comfortable yet creatively invigorating routine was established. I taught voice lessons, acting class in the afternoon, and rehearsed scenes and songs for our performances in the evenings. There was an environment of creative freedom, which allowed me to explore my research into the applications of Lessac Kinesensics to musical theatre performance during voice lessons, while challenging myself and my students to take new risks and explore new avenues of realism and truth in their acting during classwork. One truly exciting feature of this experience was the collaborative nature of IPAI, where faculty from all over America came together in Germany to share creative ideas and challenge themselves and the student-artists. In addition, our student artists had the opportunity to work with some of the brightest minds in the European theatre/opera industry, such as opera director Robert Tannenbaum, master clinicians in voice Barbara Daniels and Elizabeth Eaton, opera director Michael Sturm, and casting director Ralf Schaedler of Stage Entertainment in Hamburg. Observing these master teachers and clinicians was an invaluable tool for me as an educator, as I not only found validation in what I'm teaching but new ideas and areas of growth that I am excited to explore.

I was proud to be joined at IPAI by three UNH Theatre students – Kayla Fortin, Justin Morin, and Elise Pratt. In three short weeks, each of these talented performers grew and matured in ways that I had not expected, and it was an honor to share the experience with them. Nowhere was this growth more evident than in our last week in Germany, which the musical theatre student-artists spent in Hamburg, home of the prestigious Joop van den Ende Academy and Stage Entertainment, Europe's leading producer of Broadway caliber shows. Here, members of the Academy faculty and Ralf Schaedler, casting director for Stage Entertainment, coached and auditioned our student-artists. Several of our company, including our UNH students, had outstanding auditions and were/are being considered for positions in the Academy or future employment in the highly competitive German musical theatre market. I was also able to establish professional relationships with these international artists, which will benefit UNH and my students in the future.

By the end of the intensive experience, I was surprised to find that I didn't want to leave. I had come to love the culture and pace of German life, and more importantly the creative vitality of IPAI. Fortunately I will be returning again next year, and I look forward to forging new artistic relationships and continuing my growth as an artist-educator.



(l. to r.) UNH students Elise Pratt (junior theatre major) and Kayla Fortin (senior theatre major), professor Matt Nesmith, and UNH student Justin Morin) prior to the final performance of the IPAI season in Kiefersfelden, Germany





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